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National Council of Negro Women, Inc.

January 7, 1969

Dear Friend:

I am one of those who feel guilty that in this richest of all nations millions of our children, black and white, are victims of hunger. At least 10 million people are subsisting on a hunger level. The National School Lunch Program reaches fewer than 2 million of 6 million school age children from poor families. These are not statistics for one of the developing areas of the world; they represent the harsh facts of sufferings inflicted upon children in our own country.

The effects of hunger and malnutrition have been clearly stated by the Citizens' Board of Inquiry in a report on "Hunger USA": diet deficiencies in early childhood causes severe and irreversible organic and psychological brain damage; twice as many poor babies die before their 12th month for lack of good food; malnutrition causes lowering of resistance to infection and other disabilities which result from inadequate growth. Beyond those clinically diagnosed cases of starvation, there are the greater number of Americans who never get enough to eat or a proper diet. The ultimate social costs are to be found in patterns of unrest, distrust, alienation and withdrawal.

The Board's report, summarized in the enclosed leaflet, present myths and facts surrounding government-subsidized food programs intended to help feed the poor. Because of the inherent inadequacies of these food programs, the burdens on the poor are often increased.

Many of these poor families know their real problem. They want to improve the lives of their children.

We have begun a program of self-help Food Production Centers in Sunflower and Bolivar Counties, Mississippi and Macon County, Alabama, three of the hunger counties of the U.S. Sites have been selected for the erection of pre-fabricated Food Centers which will be manned by the poor. Families have planted seeds that will produce a crop to be harvested before winter arrives. Canning and storage are in process. A cooperative pig bank with the first fifty participating families was initiated October 11th. Garden clubs are looking for additional plots of land to be launched in the spring.

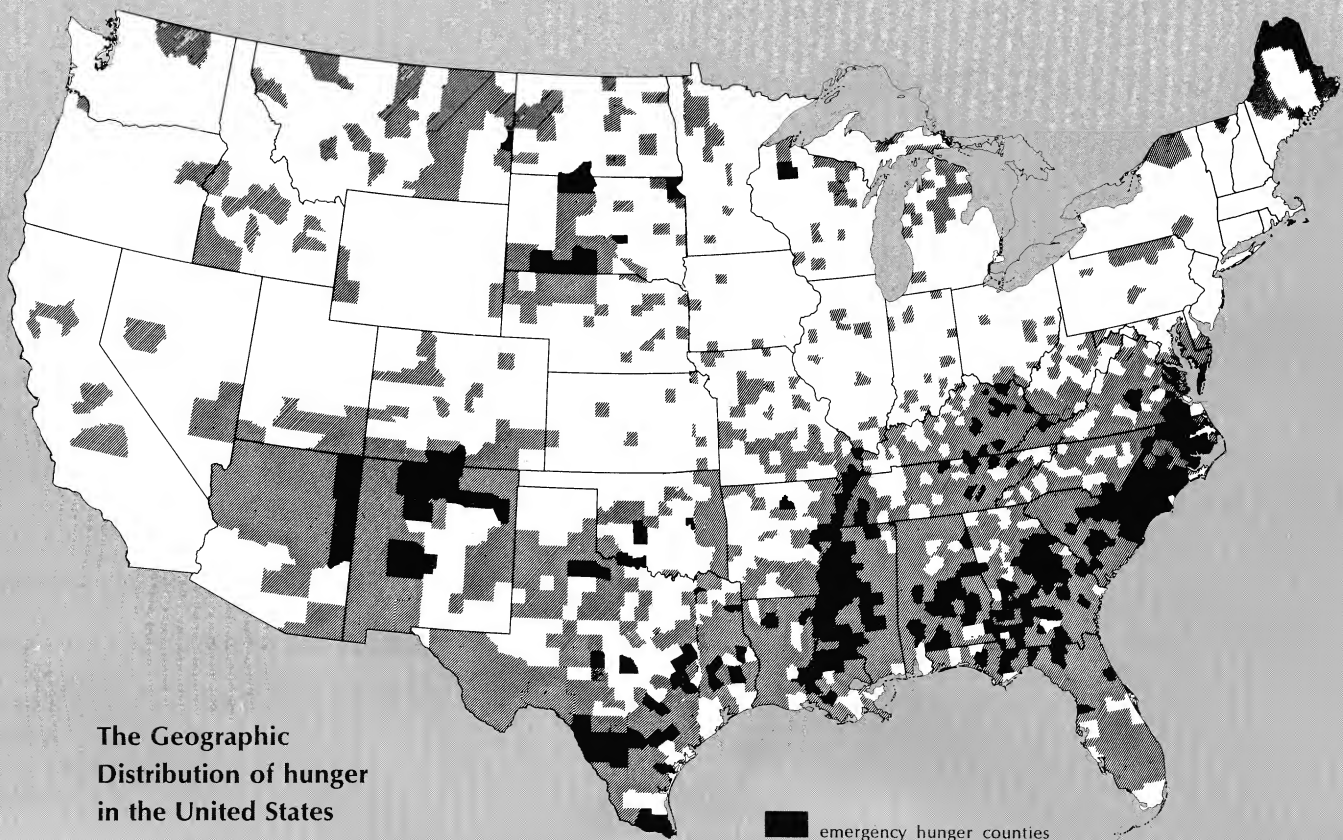
We are determined that no child shall go to bed hungry, if we can help. It can be done, if you support this effort. Please help with your tax-deductible contribution today. The children of Sunflower, Bolivar and Macon Counties await your response. Your gift to this pilot program will help poor families help themselves demonstrate what can be done to end hunger throughout the land.

Sincerely,



Lena Horne, Chairman
NCNW Life Membership Campaign

the of VOICES the poor



The Geographic
Distribution of hunger
in the United States

of the poor

the litany

No food, no meat, no milk — and the children go to bed hungry.
Sometimes they cry.

That is the Litany — heard wherever we went. This is the testimony we heard from:

Mrs. Benita Lune, San Antonio, Texas
Mr. Sherman Neace, Perry County, Kentucky
Mrs. Ruth DuBois, Bullock County, Georgia
Mrs. Clara Bolton, Jasper County, South Carolina
Mrs. Porter Salazar, San Antonio, Texas
Mrs. Jessie May Dash, Ellore, South Carolina
Mrs. Matha Moore, Savannah, Georgia
Mrs. Tjeodoro Hernandez, San Antonio, Texas

And joined by countless and faceless voices, heard by us and others —

There are days without any food four or five at a time
the parents go hungry and the child may live on powdered milk
for a week at a time when we just “make do” and mix whatever
we have with water and the end of the month when food stamps
run out, commodities run out, the Headstart doctor refers to this
as a time of “discomfort”; to a school teacher from South Caro-
lina it means taking teenagers home suffering from hunger pains

or times when we have a little something because you get food from
“the white lady” you work for or you eat what you can while you
have it because you want to know what a full belly feels like

or you buy the cheapest meat you can, neck bones and that kind of
stuff and have it a couple of times a month

And always there are the days without milk for the children

No fresh milk?

No Sir

No milk for the children?

No Sir

Do they get milk? The small ones?

No

No milk at all?

No

Ain't no one of them has milk every day. They lucky to have it
twice a month.

And there are days without meat, or vegetables or fruit.

And days with only one meal or two — or three and they aren't really
meals

And the children go to bed hungry.

Sometimes they cry.

Sometimes they ask me for something

I am not able to buy milk or food or nothing

But when they do eat, they eat the same food, day in and day out
black eyed peas, grits, flour, maybe fatback, sometimes potatoes,
beans, and where we visited homes and looked in the kitchen, the
shelves were empty —

and the refrigerator if there was one, was empty

And the sick do without medicine

...

And never enough money to buy food

\$25 per week plus \$10 every two weeks from son's part time job
to feed 12 children, ages three to 21

\$25 every two weeks planting cotton, to feed 10 children from
10 months to seven years

Eight children living on commodities while the father looks for
work; three times rejected by welfare

the human toll

In child after child we saw: evidence of vitamin and mineral deficiencies; serious untreated skin infestation and ulcerations; eye and ear diseases, also unattended bone diseases secondary to poor food intake; the prevalence of bacterial and parasitic disease, as well as severe anemia, with resulting loss of energy and ability to live a normally active life; diseases of the heart and the lungs — requiring surgery — which have gone undiagnosed and untreated; epileptic and other neurological disorders; severe kidney ailments, that in other children would warrant immediate hospitalization; and finally, in boys and girls in every county we visited, obvious evidence of severe malnutrition with injury to the body's tissues — its muscles, bones, and skin as well as an associated psychological state of fatigue, listlessness, and exhaustion.

We saw children afflicted with chronic diarrhea, chronic sores, chronic leg and arm (untreated) injuries and deformities. We saw homes without running water and live with germ-bearing mosquitoes and flies everywhere around. We saw homes with children who are lucky to eat one meal a day — and that one inadequate so far as vitamins, minerals, or protein is concerned. We saw children who don't get to drink milk, don't get to eat fruit, green vegetables, or meat. They live on starches — grits, bread, Kool Aid. Their parents may be declared ineligible for commodities, ineligible for the food stamp program, even though they have literally nothing. We saw children fed communally—that is, by neighbors who give scraps of food to children whose own parents have nothing to give them.

myths and facts

We also found ourselves surrounded by myths which were all too easy to believe because they are so comforting. We number among these:

Myth: The really poor and needy have access to adequate surplus commodities and food stamps if they are in danger of starving.

Fact: Only 5.4 million of the more than 29 million poor participate in these two government food programs, and the majority of those participating are not the poorest of the poor.

Myth: Progress is being made as a result of massive federal efforts in which multimillion dollar food programs take care of more people now than ever before.

Fact: Participation in government food programs has dropped 1.4 million in the last six years. Malnutrition among the poor has risen sharply over the past decade.

food stamp program

The food stamp program, in theory, was to correct the deficiencies of the commodity program. It was to let the poor choose their own foods. The bonus coupons they bought with their normal food dollars would multiply their food purchasing power at local stores.

the national council of negro y pilot program to feed the hung in three counties

County/State	Population	Part of Pop. that are Poor People	Poor People on Welfare	Poor People on Gov. food programs
Bolivar, Miss.	54,464	68% (37,056)	5,040	16,342
Sunflower, Miss.	45,750	68% (31,110)	3,795	8,088
Macon, Ala.	26,716	56.9% (15,081)	1,433	8,370

The National Council of Negro Women plans both direct feeding of hungry children and to undertake food production programs which can have long term effects on their lives and that of their parents. The long-term programs are those which the people themselves have suggested as solutions. These are not utopian dreams but vastly practical programs — at relatively small cost — offering long term benefits.

SELF HELP IS THE BEST HELP. Give a family some food and they will eat several meals. Give them the tools of production and they will feed themselves.

women's ry

Emergency Food Program for the Hungry — hot breakfast or hot lunch.

Needed:

\$12.50 will give one hot meal a day to one child for a month.

\$20.00 will provide vitamins for 10 children for one month.

\$10,000 will purchase a specially designed mobile unit to carry hot food to hungry children.
(Three mobile units needed)

Long term efforts to develop a community farm cooperative in each county.

A gift of:

\$50-\$300 will buy an acre of land.

\$ 5.00 will buy seeds yielding up to 75 feet each of various vegetables including, among others, tomatoes, spinach, green beans, beets, cabbage, carrots, turnips, squash.

\$ 9.00 will buy 100 baby chicks.

\$ 4.00 will buy 100 lbs. of bran for feed.

\$ 3.00 will buy a bushel of cracked corn for feed.

\$ 8.50 will buy a 50 lb. pig.

\$16.00 will buy 100 canning jars.

\$31.28 will buy a 21 quart pressure canner.

Due to the intercession of the NCNW there is today a silk screen factory in Crawfordsville, Ga., which employs 75 workers. Women who earned no more than \$7 to \$15 a week before now earn markedly more. One woman wrote to say that the \$56 she received for one week's work was more money than she had ever had at one time before.

Housing:

Two hundred poor families in Gulfport, Mississippi, will move into Government subsidized housing this fall. They will make repairs and maintain their homes and when their "sweat equity" amounts to \$350 they will receive title. "Turnkey III," as a concept, was evolved by the NCNW to make home ownership possible for poor families who had no cash for a down payment. The same formula is now being extended to housing for the poor in six other northern and southern communities.

Children:

Day care and Head Start Centers in Harlem, Brooklyn, Queens, Hackensack, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and Greensboro, North Carolina.

Pilot programs of organized services for Negro youth in Danville, Va., Minneapolis, Minn., and Miami which will then be taken over by local sponsors.

Scholarships for college education for young men and women, particularly for those whose education has been interrupted by their involvement in civil rights activities.

Contributions to the National Council of Negro Women are tax-deductible.

conclusions

We conclude that the Food Stamp Program has failed to fulfill its promise.

- Food stamp prices were set at prohibitively high levels.

- Food stamp allotments (or bonuses) were set too low to provide the purchasing power necessary to secure an adequate diet.

- No-income families were treated as non-existent. Irrational discrepancies were built into both the schedule of prices to be paid for stamps and the size of the allotments which different households of different sizes could obtain.

Considerations of administrative convenience, bureaucratic insensitivity and red tape resulted in regulations, procedures and practices which thwarted the program's objectives.

Lump sum payments, continuing review of eligibility, delays in certification of eligibility, gaps between the termination of the commodity program and the initiation of the food stamp program — all produced massive drops in participation and substantial individual suffering.

Federal deference to "local initiative" meant that those counties which traditionally had been least responsive to the needs of the poor and hungry were given veto power to prevent the program from reaching its intended beneficiaries.

the national council of negro women

The National Council of Negro Women was founded in 1935 by the late Mary McLeod Bethune to take concerted action for the advancement of the Negro woman and her family.

The National Council includes today in its membership 25 national Negro women's organizations. It also welcomes individuals as members, thousands of whom participate in more than 100 chartered local sections.

A guiding principle at the National Council is to work directly at the community level, to listen to the problems, to search out solutions and then to apply the financial resources and the skills of the Council's staff and volunteers to achieve results. NCNW is women of diverse educational and economic backgrounds bound together in a common resolve to effect basic changes at the community level.

SOME RECENT RESULTS